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AUTHOR Austin, Ann E.
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ABSTRACT

The work experiences of college presidents, deans, and midlevel administrators are examined, with attention to job characteristics, degree of participation in college decision making, loyalty and commitment to the school, and job satisfaction. Extrinsic variables of the work environment include workload, rewards, supervision, and opportunities, while intrinsic variables cover the work itself, how it is performed, the degree of autonomy over the work, and feedback received. Presidents are facing an increasing number of complex demands from within and without their institutions. While the responsibilities of deans have increased recently, it is unclear whether shifts in the college power structure will increase or restrict deans' power. Midlevel administrators, who may have to implement policies made by others, are defined as the directors and deans of support services, as well as other administrators to whom assistants report. All three groups of administrators experience excessive demands on time, considerable role conflict and stress, and limited opportunities for mobility. To enhance administrators' work experience, it is important to articulate purposes, use collaborative approaches, improve opportunities for professional growth, and increase knowledge of administrators' work. (SW)

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By Ann E. Austin

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The Work Experience Of University and College Administrators

By Ann E. Austin

College and university administrators are the keys to the success and quality of their instituitons. The decisions they make and the manner in which they implement policies determine not only the daily operations of a college or university but also its future. Today, declining revenues and enrollments, increasing expenditures, shifting public support for higher education, growing governmental intervention, and shrinking opportunities in careers all affect the work of university and college administrators. They face challenges and pressures different from those of their colleagues just a decade ago.

These changing social conditions affect administrators in major ways. As the need to allocate funds among competing groups heightens tensions within colleges and universities, decision making becomes more centralized. This process shifts greater power to the administrative side of the organization, characterized by its hierarchy, by defined domains of responsibilities, and by formalized rules and regulations (Anderson 1983; Carnegie Foundation 1982). This shift reflects the response not of individual administrators but of an entire organizational structure. The administration of a college or university carries the weight and responsibility of managing the institution in the face of external pressures.

Even as institutional power is shifting toward the bureaucratic structure of colleges and universities, serious external pressures on higher education also affect the individual work experiences of administrators. Traditionally, colleges and universities are viewed as predominantly normative organizations; that is, reward systems in higher education are based mostly on the belief that a college or university is engaged in good work (Etzioni 1961). Both faculty and administrators generally are "individuals possessing much intellectual curiosity . . . [and] willing to trade greater rewards for a relatively free and unregimented work style" (Corson 1979, p. #4). External pressures on higher education, however, are changing the culture toward a more utilitarian emphasis. Demands to do more with less, to be accountable, and to use formal evaluation to measure output are increasing. In short, the administrative structure acquires new power while individual administrators acquire new and greater challenges, pressures, and expectations (Austin and Gamson 1983).

Based on the assumption that the quality of administrators' work is a central ingredient in the success of a college's or university's response to current external pressures, this essay analyzes the work experience of administrators in higher education.* The framework for analysis (Austin and Gamson 1983) examines several sets of conceptual variables across three levels of collegiate administrators: presidents, deans, and midlevel administrators. The variables are fourfold.

- **The Characteristics of the job** include both extrinsic and intrinsic characteristics. Extrinsic variables describe the work environment or conditions under which work is done—workload, rewards, the nature of supervision, and the opportunity structure, for example. Intrinsic variables describe the nature of the work itself: how it is performed, the autonomy and responsibility an administrator has over the work, and the nature of feedback received about the work done.
- **Power in organizational decisions** addresses the degree to which an administrator participates in organizational decision making.
- **Relationship to the institution** concerns loyalty and commitment to the organization.
- **Outcomes of the work** include satisfaction, dissatisfaction, and morale.

Not every set of variables is discussed in this essay for each group of administrators, as research findings are more extensive in some areas than in others. Department heads are not considered here at all because their dual role as faculty member and administrator makes their position especially unique.

The Work Experience of Presidents

In the face of changing environmental conditions and changes within higher education, the position of president has also changed tremendously in recent years. Perhaps of greatest significance are the number and the complexity of the demands presidents face (Buxton, Pritchard, and Buxton 1976; Kauffman 1980).

Extrinsic Aspects Activities and Role

Many metaphors have been used to define the role of university or college president, all suggesting the diverse functions and constituencies that presidents sdhandle. "Politician," "business executive" (Cohen and March 1974), and "symphony orchestra conductor"

*Many of the ideas presented in this essay appear in *Academic Workplace: New Demands, Heightened Tensions* (Akustin and Gamson 1983). This monograph, listed in the bibliography, cites many related sources that could not be included in this *Update*.

(Kauffman 1980) have been popular models. Whereas presidents were expected to be "healers" in the 1960s, in more recent years they have been asked to be "retrenchers" (Kauffman 1982), "managers," and "monitors" (Kramer and Mendenhall 1982), terms indicating the fiscal challenges their institutions face. The literature is dotted with calls for presidents to be "leaders" and "liaisons" (Kauffman 1982; Kramer and Mendenhall 1982). The leadership function is to keep all concerned, both inside and outside constituencies and forces, keenly aware of the central purposes, value, and worth of the higher education enterprise (Kauffman 1982, p. 18).

While many observers agree that today's president must be leader, manager, and institutional representative (Kauffman 1980), university and college presidents find conflicting expectations among their constituencies on the specific ways in which they should fulfill these obligations. A decision or action that pleases the faculty may disappoint students, alumni, or the governing board. Academic presidents get little advance training for their complex tasks however. Most learn on the job (Kauffman 1980). In fact, many presidents have skipped stages in the "ideal" progression from professor to department head, dean, provost, and finally to the senior executive position (Moore 1983; Moore et al. 1983).

Presidents experience severe demands on their time (Kauffman 1980) and count lack of time for family, leisure, teaching, and research activities as sources of dissatisfaction (Buxton, Pritchard, and Buxton 1976; Solomon and Tierney 1977). Their most time-consuming responsibilities include the planning and administration of budgets, program development and improvement, and relationships with governing boards (Duea 1981). Working with budgets contributes to their greatest stress; for presidents of private institutions, fund raising and alumni affairs rank second in importance and stress (Duea 1981).

Opportunity Structure

Though a presidency is considered the pinnacle of academic success, presidents indeed serve "at the pleasure of the board" (Kauffman 1980). An average term of office is between five and eight years (Cohen and March 1974; Nason 1980b), though one study of more than 1,400 campuses found that approximately 20 percent of immediate past presidents had served for 20 years or more (Carbone 1981). Because few comparable positions exist, presidents may stay in office longer than they desire for lack of other attractive alternatives (Kauffman 1980). It is not surprising that presidents are prime candidates for burnout, particularly under the demands of current pressures (Vaughan 1982).

Reward Structure

The median salary of the chief executive of an academic system is $67,675, and the median salary for a chief executive of a single institution is $58,101 (Chronicle 1984, p. 18). Data from another survey (Jacobson 1984) indicate that salary and fringe benefits correlate positively with institutional size. Fringe benefits for presidents are not extensive, however. While 91 percent of the 1,328 institutions studied contributed to retirement plans, less than one-third contributed more than 7 percent of the president's salary. Just less than 20 percent of the institutions assumed the travel expenses of a spouse accompanying a president on work-related trips. The study concluded that academic presidents do not receive compensation comparable to corporate presidents (Jacobson 1984).

Instrinsic Aspects

Presidents enjoy the special status and respect that accompany their position as well as the intrinsic reward of knowing their work is important (Cohen and March 1974; Kauffman 1980). These rewards, however, cannot efface other difficulties intrinsic to their work. Studies indicate that presidents experience limited privacy, strains on their families, and feelings of claustrophobia. They can be very lonely, finding themselves with few peers and sometimes finding that senior faculty or administrators are disappointed not to have been selected themselves (Riesman 1982; Watkins 1984). The president "operates in an environment of high visibility where his or her every move is scrutinized by the media as well as a host of pressure groups on and off campus" (Kramer and Mendenhall 1982, p. 9). Furthermore, presidents often find feedback about their work lacking. Governing boards are not always clear about their expectations and their criteria for judgment (Nason 1980a).

The Power of Presidents

While the position carries considerable authority, several recent studies warn that presidential autonomy and power are weakening. Increasing state and federal regulation and greater intervention in institutional affairs by state legislative bodies and coordinating boards are diminishing the power of campus presidents (Alton 1982; Kauffman 1980, 1982; Winkler 1984). A comparison of studies done in 1971 and in 1981 on resignations of college and university presidents found that relationships with governing boards ranked third in importance in this decade as a reason for resignation, compared to fourteenth in 1971 (Alton 1982). Presidential power in academic affairs may be waning (Winkler 1984). While the institutional power structure may be shifting to the administrative side, presidents as individuals are not necessarily gaining that power. Yet it is thus that they must grapple with the increasing demands of forces within and without their institutions.

Personal Outcomes

Despite the demands, the office of president is a rewarding one. Presidents derive considerable satisfaction from the challenges they face, their autonomy and power (however circumscribed), the prestige of the office, the relationships they develop with students, faculty, and administrators, and the opportunity to contribute to their institutions and the world (Buxton, Pritchard, and Buxton 1976; Kanter 1979; Solomon and Tierney 1977). Some of the external challenges described previously create dissatisfaction, however. State oversight of higher education limits their power, and economic problems concern them. Excessive demands on their time are frustrating (Buxton, Pritchard, and Buxton 1976; Kauffman 1980). As presidents gain power when their institutions face external pressures, tension and dissatisfaction also increase.

The Work Experience of Deans

Many questions are unanswered about the work deans do, how they behave, and how organizational and personal variables affect the nature of their work (Dill 1980; Griffiths 1980; Ryan 1980). But understanding the worklife and necessary qualifications for deans is critical:

New demands from various constituencies for miracles of performance are being added to old expectations, which were presumptuous enough! Even without the new demands, the role implies activities for which most deans are poorly prepared. We have to strike a new balance between what we expect and how we approach recruiting, training, information flows, and incentives (Dill 1980, p. 262.)

Extrinsic Aspects

Many deans' tasks and responsibilities have increased in recent years, making demands on their time great (Dill 1980). Their salaries vary according to college, with medical deans earning the highest salaries ($98,000 mean salary in 1983-84), followed by deans of denistry, business, engineering, and law. Education and nursing deans received lower than average salaries at $46,200 and $40,863, respectively (Chronicle 1984, p. 18). When compared to faculty on 12-month schedules, deans do not earn substantially higher salaries. While they receive some expense allowances and other fringe benefits, their time for consulting and research is less than that available to professors. Managers at comparable levels in corporations receive better extrinsic rewards (Dill 1980).

Intrinsic Aspects

The research on deans is considerably less extensive than that on presidents and on other middle administrators. The existing studies, however, point to several characteristics of the position that are critical in determining the work experience of deans. Serving as "linking pins" and "mediators" between central administration and faculty, deans hold positions of high role tension (Katz and Kahn 1978; Scott 1978a). They face colleagues who "hold one set of expectations for the dean's role in the administrative organization and another set for his role in the academic organization" (Ryan 1980, p. 143). As deans administer tighter budgets and make difficult personnel decisions, tensions between deans and their faculty may heighten.

Power

The extent of deans' power has not yet been studied thoroughly. On the one hand, the blurring of lines of responsibility when a dean links administration and faculty may offer opportunities for a dean to exercise power (Ryan 1980, p. 143). On the other hand, the growing number of middle administrators in recent years means deans must compete with other offices in brokering power (Dill 1980, p. 273). Whether shifts in the power structure of universities and colleges will increase or restrict the power of deans is not yet clear. If the deanship is to remain a key position, scholars urge deans to be "academic leaders" who articulate ideas and maintain their schools' social responsiveness, in addition to being "managers" (Dill 1980, p. 274).

The Work Experience of Middle Administrators

Inherent in the position of midlevel administrators is the tension of implementing policies often determined by others (Scott 1978a, 1979). Midlevel administrators, defined as the directors and deans of support services as well as other administrators to whom assistants report, link vertical and horizontal levels of their organizations and interact with diverse constituencies—senior administrators, faculty, students, alumni, parents, and trustees.

Extrinsic Aspects

The specific tasks of middle administrators vary according to office. Many midlevel administrators experience stress resulting from lack of time, limited resources, excessive bureaucratic detail and paperwork, and problems with staff and students (Bucci 1983; Scott 1978b). The trend toward specialization of skills heightens the professionalization of middle administrators, but it also contributes to the expectation that higher education administration is a career with progressive steps. With relatively few openings at the higher levels, however, midlevel administrators face limited opportunities for advancement (Anselm 1980; Kanter 1979; Scott 1978a, 1979), restricted opportunity for mobility or change can lead to frustration.

The median salaries of middle administrators span a range, with the majority between $20,000 and $35,000. In 1983-84, chief budget officers earned $43,500, chiefs of physical plant $31,850, food and services directors $27,636, and student activities directors $24,464 (Chronicle 1984, p. 18). In 1982-83, directors of sports information, assistant directors of admissions, assistant registrars, and assistant directors of student unions all earned median salaries, in recent years the balance has been shifting toward the faculty (Jacobson 1983). In some institutions, faculty have been selected over administrators for salary increases, affecting morale.

Intrinsic Aspects

A considerable literature discusses the status of middle administrators in the eyes of the faculty. As part of the organization's bureaucratic structure, administrators are not always accepted and respected by the faculty as full members of the academic community (Anselm 1980; Scott 1978a; Thomas 1978). Despite this problem, midlevel administrators themselves identify such intrinsic dimensions as the autonomy they have to perform their responsibilities, pride in their institutions, recognition and prestige, and the opportunity to meet interesting people and colleagues as strong contributors to their commitment. They clearly value the intrinsic qualities of their work (Austin 1984).

Power

While midlevel administrators control information and thus influence senior administrators, they typically do not make institutional policy (Anselm 1980; Scott 1978a). The extent of their power is limited to their expertise in particular areas and varies with institutional characteristics (Ferguson 1981).

Relationship of Organization

Middle administrators face frustrations, yet they remain strongly committed to their positions and universities (Austin 1984; Thomas 1978). Intrinsic factors in their work, such as pride in what they do, autonomy in how they do it, and interaction with interesting people, may contribute more to their commitment than salary and other extrinsic factors. If extrinsic factors drop so low that administrators feel undervalued, however, their commitment can be threatened (Austin 1984).

Personal Outcomes

Midlevel administrators unlike faculty, typically are not evaluated systematically. Lacking clear criteria and evaluation, they may be uncertain at times about the quality of their performance. Institutions need to improve in this area. Although research has found administrators' job satisfaction high (Scott 1978a; Solomon and Tierney 1977), limited opportunities for advancement, pressures on time and insufficient resources to meet demands are sources of dissatisfaction.

What Is Distinctive about Administrators' Work Experience?

While many of the intrinsic aspects of administrators' work and their satisfaction and commitment remain quite stable, extrinsic conditions are changing. All three groups of administrators experience excessive demands on time, considerable role conflict and stress, and limited opportunities for mobility. Power within the organization is shifting toward the bureaucratic structure, but individual administrators are not necessarily gaining any of the power. In fact, many presidents, deans, and middle administrators feel their power constrained by outside pressures.

What Strategies Will Enhance the Work Experience of Administrators?

Articulate Purposes

The community of higher education must assert its sense of purpose. Commitment to an institution's mission by those who work in it is vitally important to the organization's effectiveness and quality (Katzell, Yankelovich et al. 1975; Peters and Waterman 1982). Administrators are motivated and committed more by intrinsic factors than by extrinsic ones. Furthermore, intrinsic factors may support continuing levels of commitment, even when extrinsic rewards are weak. If administrators feel that their efforts are not valued and appreciated and if external rewards slip too far, however, their commitment becomes strained (Austin 1984). To enhance commitment, senior administrators must articulate the missions, values, and beliefs of their institutions, and they must recognize the essential work done by their administrative staff.

Use Collaborative Approaches

Business and industry are recognizing that collaboration among employees and flexibility in structure are key elements in effective organizations (Kanter 1983; Peters and Waterman 1982). Writers in higher education are showing interest in participative decision making, recognizing that involvement contributes to understanding and consensus (Austin and Gamson 1983; Nichols 1982; Powers and Powers 1983; Spiro and Campbell 1983). While senior administrators retain leadership, a participatory approach generates useful ideas, uses the expertise of many individuals, and provides a larger number of people with opportunities for professional growth.

Improve Opportunities for Professional Growth

In light of limited opportunities for administrators to move to new positions universities and colleges should consider new ways to offer them professional growth and career development. Far less has been written about administrators' development than about faculty members' development. Innovative arrangements of workload, internships, and exchanges are approaches used in faculty development that may be adapted for administrators. Other ideas may emerge from the human resource programs and quality circles developing in business and industry (Bowles, Gordon, and Weisskopf 1983; Simmons and Mares 1983).

Increase Knowledge of Administrators' Worklife

While a body of knowledge is developing, questions remain. Special attention should be directed to the work experience of vice presidents and other senior administrators and of deans, who have not been studied as much as presidents and midlevel administrators'. Another particularly interesting question concerns the relationship between administrators' work experience and their productivity. Administrators are vital members of the academic community. Increased knowledge about their work can spark new ideas for improving organizational quality and individuals' satisfaction and effectiveness.

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